

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **Sekretariat Fourth for the Fourth (404): Defend Press Freedom, Uphold Democracy**

4 December 2024

We, the Sekretariat Fourth for the Fourth (404), representing a coalition of media organizations, journalists, and civil society advocates, firmly oppose the proposed amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (PPPA 1984), Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) and other related laws, including the proposed Online Safety Act (ONSA), that threaten press freedom and freedom of expression in Malaysia.

As the Fourth Estate, the media plays a crucial role in upholding democracy by ensuring accountability, transparency, and the free flow of information. The proposed amendments and new laws, which aim to expand government control over digital and traditional media, undermine these principles and erode public trust in democratic governance.

#### **Key Concerns:**

1. **Composite of laws being enacted or amended**, such as the PPPA, CMA, ONSA and others, build a stark picture of extensive government overreach into media freedom and freedom of expression, without effectively stating what is the purported purpose and clear justification for the increased scope, powers and sanctions.
2. **Lack of Stakeholder Consultation**: Amendments and new laws have been drafted without meaningful engagement with media practitioners, civil society, and the public, reflecting a disregard for inclusive democratic processes.
3. **Expanded Government Control**: Provisions for tighter regulation of digital and print media threaten editorial independence and create an environment of fear and censorship.
4. **Vague Definitions and Increased Penalties**: Ambiguities in the interpretation of "harmful content" and heavier penalties for non-compliance, as evident in the CMA amendments, could be misused to suppress dissent.

We emphasize that these measures conflict with Article 10 of the Federal Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, and violate international standards on freedom of expression.

#### **Our Demands:**

1. **Halt All Repressive Amendments and new laws**: Repeal plans to strengthen control over media operations, particularly through the PPPA 1984, CMA 1998 and related laws.
2. **Engage Stakeholders**: Establish a transparent, consultative process involving journalists, editors, and civil society to address genuine concerns and constructive participation of all.
3. **Uphold Media Independence**: Accelerate the formation of an independent Malaysian Media Council to foster self-regulation and accountability within the media industry.
4. **Protect Public Interest**: Focus on legislation promoting transparency, such as a Right to Information Act, rather than imposing restrictive controls.

Press freedom is not just a media issue — it is a public right and the foundation of an informed society. Without it, the public's ability to hold power to account is severely compromised.

We call on the government to honor its commitments to reform and democratic principles by rejecting repressive laws and ensuring a free, independent, and vibrant press for all Malaysians.

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**Issued by:**

Sekretariat Fourth for the Fourth (404)

Defending the Fourth Estate, Defending Democracy

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